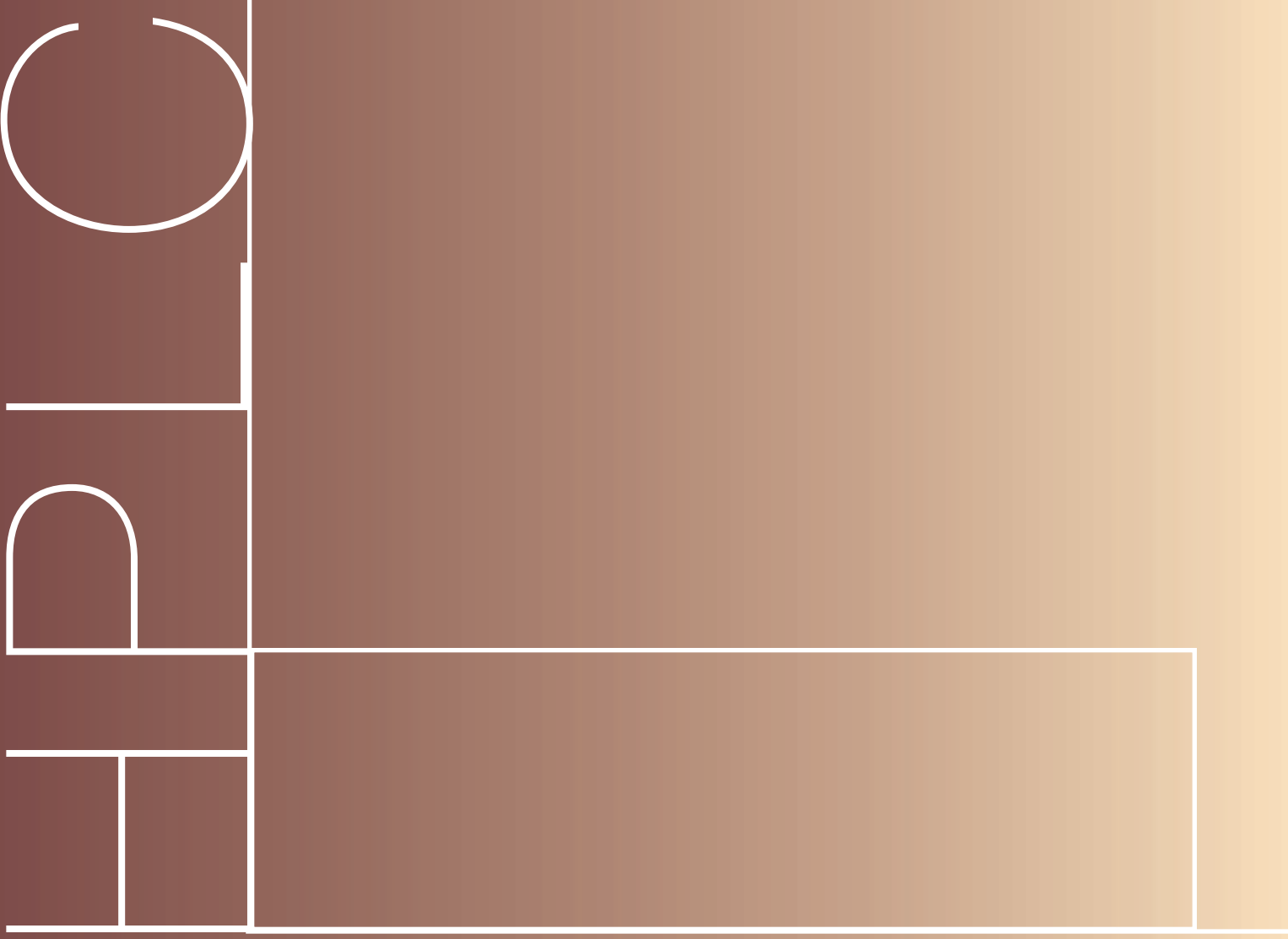

Creating High Performing and Equitable Schools

HPLC Project: Building the Capacity of Schools Serving Low-income Students to Develop and Implement High Performance Learning Communities

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, OERI

Readiness of Low-Performing Schools for Comprehensive Reform

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PREFACE

The High Performance Learning Communities (HPLC) Project is a five-year project funded in October 1996 by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (OERI). Its purpose is to develop, test, and replicate strategies that can help schools in high poverty areas improve to the point of becoming high performing.

Research about exemplary schools has demonstrated that some schools serving low-income students have had exceptional success, providing a knowledge base on "what works." However, the dissemination and translation of "what works" into the comprehensive reform of schools on a large scale has not happened. The HPLC Project speaks to this issue. It has distilled research about effective schools into succinct statements that describe "High Performance Learning Communities"-the HPLC Principles.

With the Principles as the framework for reform, the Project has worked with a network of 18 to 30 schools serving low-income students in California and Oregon to develop strategies that enable them and other schools to become High Performance Learning Communities. The project's research describes how these principles are implemented under different conditions and identifies support strategies (including practitioner tools, procedures, and materials) that facilitate starting, implementing, and maintaining High Performance Learning Communities.

This report, Readiness of Low-Performing Schools for Comprehensive Reform, is one of a series of reports that identifies critical issues in school reform and offers the HPLC approach and repertoire of strategies for addressing them. For more information, contact RPP International at (510) 450 -2550 or check the following websites:

http://www.rppintl.com/hplc/index.htm
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/hplc.html

RPP International directs the HPLC Project. Two organizations collaborated as full partners in the first three years of the contract, the Bay Area Coalition of Essential Schools, led by Steve Jubb, and California Tomorrow, led by Laurie Olsen. They contributed greatly to the formulation and development of the HPLC approach in terms of its concepts, support strategies, and practical tools and materials. We wish to thank them for their inspiration and hard work. Throughout the contract, the schools in the HPLC network have been close collaborators and colleagues. The relationship of so many committed practitioners with our team of researchers and support providers has been one of mutual learning and respect. Whatever valuable lessons for the improvement of education may flow from the Project are the direct result of our participation together.

The authors wish to thank staff that did the intense and demanding support work and meticulous documentation upon which this report rests. Sofia Aburto, John Ericson, Nancy Kamprath, Akili Moses, Beryl Nelson, Debi Silverman, Haleh Sprehe, Victoria Thorp, and Aurora Wood put in long hours and demonstrated time and again their commitment to helping schools in poverty areas reach for excellence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The HPLC Project

The literature on school reform reveals both hopeful and disturbing findings. Research has shown that while most low-income students have not achieved at a high level, low-income students in *some* schools have experienced exceptional success. Numerous studies of such exemplary schools have identified school characteristics and instructional strategies that have been linked to high levels of learning for low-income students (Berman, Minicucci, McLaughlin, Nelson, & Woodworth, 1995; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Rose, 1995; Rossi & Stringfield, 1995; Waxman, Walker De Felix, & Anderson, 1992). While research has thus identified promising examples from which various comprehensive reform models have been formulated, the literature does not show that even the best reform models and practices have been consistently replicated on a broad scale.[1] The field thus knows much about the characteristics of high performing schools, but little about how to create more of them, particularly in low-income settings.

The High Performance Learning Communities (HPLC) Project, funded in 1996 by OERI of the US Department of Education, was initiated to focus action-research on creating and sustaining exemplary schools in high poverty contexts. The Project has identified key characteristics in five areas. The high performing schools have a ***shared vision*** of excellence and equity, they develop a ***challenging curriculum*** with high expectations for all students and ***instruction that engages*** students to reach for excellence, they ***organize students and time*** to afford quality learning opportunities for staff and students alike, they create a ***collaborative school culture*** that enables the school to be a community of learners, and ***they actively involve their parents and community*** in student learning. The concept of a *High Performance Learning Community (HPLC)* aptly captures the essence of a school that displays these characteristics. The Project has further distilled research-based practices that reflect these characteristics into a working set of "Principles of High Performance Learning Communities." These HPLC Principles serve to define goals and dimensions of comprehensive reform.[2]

Over the past three years, the action component of the HPLC Project has developed and tested support strategies designed to assist schools to become High Performance Learning Communities. In 1999, we began a systematic effort to replicate these strategies in settings that have proved to be the most difficult to change—namely, chronically low-performing schools. This paper identifies key issues in initiating comprehensive reform in one strand of these replication activities.[3] The paper describes the use and effectiveness of HPLC strategies in schools identified as low performing by the state of California under a program aimed at turning these schools around. The next section briefly describes the state program.

The California Program for Under-performing Schools

In April 1999, the California legislature approved SBX1, establishing the Public School Performance Accountability Program that would consist of an Academic Performance Index, an Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program, and a Governor's High Achieving/Improving Schools Program. This state-driven accountability process imposes heavy sanctions if improvement does not occur, but also provides funding for a structured planning and evaluation process intended to help selected low-performing schools improve student performance.

In summer 1999, 430 schools that scored below the 50th percentile on the Standardized Testing and Reporting program (STAR)

achievement tests were invited to participate in the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program. The legislature appropriated $16.5 million from the California State General Fund for 1999 planning for the underperfroming schools. About 330 schools received $50,000 planning grants to work with an external evaluator and a community team to identify barriers to school performance and develop an action plan to improve student achievement. An additional 100 schools received a minimum of $50,000 and a maximum of up to $200 per student to implement research-based, comprehensive school reform (CSRD) to improve student achievement

The State Board of Education disseminated minimum qualifications for external evaluators and, through an application and interview process, developed a list of qualified external evaluators from which schools and districts could choose. RPP International, the contractor for the HPLC Project, was one of 46 organizations on the approved list of external evaluators. The SBE provided each school district governing board with jurisdiction over a school selected for participation in the Immediate Intervention/ Underperforming Schools Program. School districts were encouraged to work with the schools to contract with an external evaluator and to appoint a broad-based schoolsite and community team (the School-Community Team or SCT).

As per the accountability law, each school's external evaluator completed a review of the school that identified weaknesses that contributed to the school's below-average performance and made recommendations for improvement (the Needs Assessment) by December 15th, 1999. The external evaluators were charged with the task of working with staff and the SCT to develop an action plan with prescribed research-based components to improve the academic achievement of the pupils enrolled at the school. After approval by the local governing board (March 15, 2000), the two-year Action Plan was submitted to the Department of Education (by April 15, 2000) with a request for two-years of funding to implement the plan in 2000-2002. Schools were allowed to request up to $168 per pupil for each of two years to implement the action plan and were encouraged to incorporate matching school site, Title I, and other funds.

Under this program, the Academic Performance Index (API) is used to measure the schools' performance. At this time, the sole indicator used to calculate the API is the SAT 9 (called STAR test in California). By 2004, other indicators such as attendance, graduation rates, the augmented STAR (based on state wide academic standards) and high school exit examination data are projected to be added to the API calculation. The school's API in July 1999 is considered to be its baseline score from which expected annual percentage growth targets are based. The minimum growth target is five percent annually.

Schools not meeting the minimum percentage growth target by July 2001, must work with the district governing board, in consultation with the external evaluator and the school community team, to choose from a range of interventions for the school. Such interventions may include possible reassignment of school personnel, negotiation of site-specific amendments to collective bargaining agreements, or other changes deemed appropriate in order to continue implementing the action plan and to make progress toward meeting the school's growth targets.

Schools not meeting annual grow targets by July 2002 are subject to stricter sanctions. Schools not meeting performance goals and not showing significant growth will be identified as low-performing, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction will assume all legal rights, duties, and powers of the governing board with respect to the school. The Principal shall be reassigned, and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, in consultation with the State Board of Education, shall be required to choose

at least one intervention specified in Section 52055.5 (c) of PSAA. Schools not meeting performance goals but demonstrating significant growth, as determined by the California State Board of Education, must continue to participate in II/USP and will receive an additional year of funding for implementation. Schools meeting or exceeding growth targets are to receive a monetary or non-monetary award. Once the school has met or exceeded its growth target, it will receive no more funding for II/USP.

Central Questions and Contents of This Paper

Five low-performing (and low-income) schools selected RPP as their external evaluator for under this program.[4] We were chosen because we proposed to use support strategies developed and proven to be effective in the HPLC Project. Our goal was to "replicate" HPLC strategies under truly difficult circumstances—namely, low-performing schools mandated to change under the state accountability law. The schools in the original HPLC Consortium had volunteered to participate in reform, not required to do so by the state. By taking on this new challenge, we could test the circumstances under which HPLC strategies support comprehensive reform.

More generally, this paper addresses two related questions, one a research and the other an action question. Under what conditions, are HPLC support strategies effective and, therefore, replicable? What lessons have we learned about replication?

The paper also raises questions that go beyond the specifics of the HPLC Project. The Project is one approach to comprehensive reform, but many other approaches and models have been developed. Yet, success with chronically low-performing schools has been quite limited. Why?

Our experience discussed in this paper suggests that schools can be in different *states of readiness* to undertake comprehensive reform. Some low-performing schools experience trouble functioning on day-to-day matters, let alone being ready to tackle the longer-term proposition of comprehensive reform. On the other end of the spectrum, some schools are able to identify and agree on sustained strategies for action. These latter schools are in a high state of readiness in the sense that they can successfully engage in the processes needed to undertake a deep and sweeping change process. Readiness is a pre-condition for comprehensive reform. If a low-performing school is not ready, then a great deal of CSRD energy and resources could be expended fruitlessly—indeed such efforts might do more harm than good. These resources might better be spent on understanding and increasing a school's state of readiness.

These concerns led us to ask the following questions. What do we mean by being ready for comprehensive reform? What contextual conditions affect readiness and in what ways? What support strategies work under what conditions to move a low-performing school from a low to a high state of readiness? This paper addresses these issues.

II. Analyzing School Readiness and Pre-Conditions for Comprehensive Reform

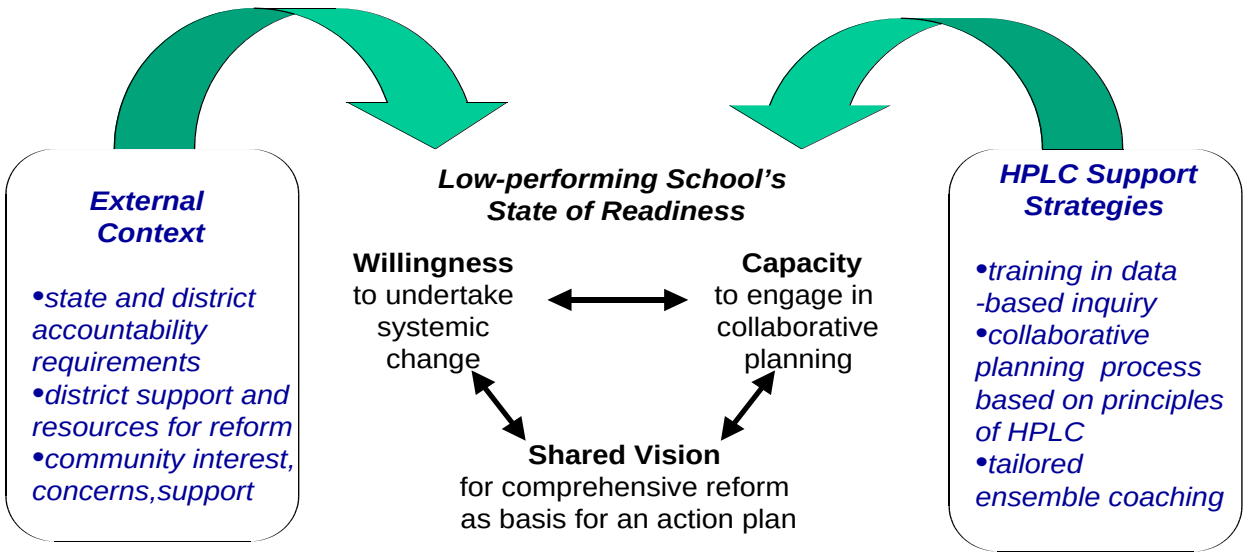
Conceptualizing Readiness

From the very first set of meetings with administrators, staff, and parents of the five II/USP schools, RPP's action-research team knew that the schools varied greatly in their readiness to undertake the comprehensive change process envisioned in the state law. Despite the undeniable common fact that the students in all these schools had test scores that were unacceptably low, the schools were strikingly different. This simple and readily observable reality of diversity teaches a lesson that policy-makers often seem unable or unwilling to grasp. As external evaluators intervening in the school, we had to identify what was unique about each school so that *our support strategies could be adapted to fit* the strengths, weaknesses and context of the school. Policies or processes that are not so adapted seem unlikely to have any lasting effect, aside from cynicism.

Accordingly, we asked ourselves, in what ways were these schools different from one another in terms of their readiness for reform? To answer this question, we had to address an antecedent question. What are the critical characteristics or dimensions of readiness?

Figure 1 suggests elements of readiness analyzed in this paper. We define a school's readiness as the likelihood of the school being able to successfully engage in processes needed to undertake a systemic change process. The circle indicates that readiness depends on three interrelated factors—namely, the school's *willingness* to undertake reform, its *capacity* to engage in a deep and searching change process, and its *shared vision* for student learning and school operations that can serve as the basis for an action plan for comprehensive reform. As we describe later, we worked with one school where at the end of our work the school was high on willingness, capacity and shared vision. It had in place an action plan and was ready to begin implementation. In sharp contrast, our work with another school did not succeed in helping it to

Figure 1. Readiness Pre-conditions for Comprehensive Reform



become strong in all three dimensions. Like a chain, readiness is no stronger than the weakest link. This school remained at a low state of readiness, despite having an action plan acceptable to the state. The school's action plan did not reflect a widely shared vision among staff or community members, and the school lacked the willingness and capacity to go forward.

In the course of working with the schools, we identified two crucial components of willingness. First, the *urgency* that the school staffs, community members, and district officials have toward the need for comprehensive reform of the school. Second, the extent to which all stakeholders *buy-into* a school-wide planning process and vision. The next subsection illustrates and discusses these components of willingness in the context of the five low-performing schools.

We also identified three critical components of a school's capacity for reform, aside from willingness. First, *skilled and distributed leadership* needed to orchestrate a planning process. Second, *collaborative structures and processes* to carry out schoolwide reflection and planning. Third, a minimal level of organizational functioning (which we call the school's *stage of development*) to enable a school to address systemic change. The next subsection describes and elaborates on the meaning of these components.

Before doing so, two external clusters of factors affect school readiness and the likelihood that the school's state of readiness can be increased. The first is the *external context* that the forms the background for the school's reform efforts. The left-hand box in Figure 1 lists contextual factors that we found to be of central concern for the five low-performing schools. These factors include the basic accountability context established by the state or the district. As the last section described, the state accountability program set up a demanding set of requirements, initiated by public identification of the schools as low-performing. This report describes how the state program worked for the five schools.

The community context also affects the likelihood that reform can happen. Schools have long histories, yet any intervention always takes place at one moment in the political and social context of an ongoing flow of school operations. How communities, given their history, respond to the state program is thus part of the story, as we shall see.

Similarly, districts can act toward their low-performing schools in ways that support or squash true reform. For example, the omission of direct support to schools very much in need can itself greatly and negatively affect the prospects for change, as the text will illustrate.

The other external cluster in Figure 1 consists of the HPLC support strategies (see the right-hand box in the figure). From the repertoire of strategies developed in the HPLC Project, three strategies were suited to the state program and could be adapted to the context of the schools. These support strategies are data-based inquiry; collaborative planning based on HPLC Principles; and coaching tailored to a school's circumstances. Each HPLC strategy is composed of tools and procedures that had been co-developed and tested with schools of the HPLC Consortium. Chapter III describes the application of these strategies and their effects.

Context Differences across Low-Performing Schools

Though the five II/USP schools are all low performing, they are considerably different from one another. Table 1 summarizes basic demographic and other characteristics of these schools. Two are elementary schools and three are middle schools. Maple is the largest of these schools with a student population of 688 for its two grades. Pine, which is in District #2, has about one-quarter African-American students, one-third White, and one-third Hispanic.African-American students are the majority in the other schools, which are all in District #1. The test

Table 1. Demographics and Context of Replication Schools

	Grade Levels	ADA	Demographics %	SAT-9 Reading [Scores are 7th grade for middle and 3rd grade for elementary schools]	SAT-9 Math [Scores are 7th grade for middle and 3rd grade for elementary schools]
Elm DISTRICT #1	6-8	580	American Indian: .3 Asian: 6.5 Pacific Islander: .2 Filipino: .6 Hispanic: 10.9 African American: 65.4 White: 16.1	% Above 75th NPR: 16 % Above 50th NPR: 37 % Above 25th NPR: 67	% Above 75th NPR: 17 % Above 50th NPR: 41 % Above 25th NPR: 60
Maple DISTRICT #1	7-8	688	American Indian: 0 Asian: 13.4 Pacific Islander: .1 Filipino: .6 Hispanic: 12.4 African American: 71.9 White: .9	% Above 75th NPR: 3 % Above 50th NPR: 15 % Above 25th NPR: 37	% Above 75th NPR: 7 % Above 50th NPR: 24 % Above 25th NPR: 50
Palm DISTRICT #1	K-6	482	American Indian: .4 Asian: 14.1 Pacific Islander: .6 Filipino: .6 Hispanic: 11.8 African American: 70.5 White: 1	% Above 75th NPR: 5 % Above 50th NPR: 21 % Above 25th NPR: 42	% Above 75th NPR: 7 % Above 50th NPR: 25 % Above 25th NPR: 46
Willow DISTRICT #1	6-8	480	American Indian: 0 Asian: 1 Pacific Islander: .8 Filipino: 0 Hispanic: 7.1 African American: 90.0 White: .4	% Above 75th NPR: 5 % Above 50th NPR: 14 % Above 25th NPR: 37	% Above 75th NPR: 3 % Above 50th NPR: 11 % Above 25th NPR: 28
Pine DISTRICT #2	K-6	449	American Indian: .2 Asian: 5.8 Pacific Islander: 1.3 Filipino: 5.3 Hispanic: 31.2 African American: 23.6 White: 32.5	% Above 75th NPR: 18 % Above 50th NPR: 38 % Above 25th NPR: 70	% Above 75th NPR: 9 % Above 50th NPR: 43 % Above 25th NPR: 65

scores for Maple and Willow are the lowest of the group, with 15 percent and 14 percent, respectively, of the students scoring at or above the fiftieth percentile in reading and 24 percent and 11 percent in math. Pine and Elm have higher student test scores, though these schools are still at the level of under-performing schools.

When we began to interact with the schools, they also differed greatly in their readiness to undertake comprehensive reform. Our support strategies were aimed at increasing the schools' readiness—that is, their willingness, capacity and vision— for comprehensive reform that would enable them to permanently transcend their status as low performing schools. The following sections describe the readiness of each school when we started our work and how readiness changed as a result of the intervention.

School Capacity for Comprehensive Reform

Stage of development

The first component of capacity is the school's stage of development.[5] This concept refers to the systemic qualities of the school as an operating organization. We define a school's stage of development in terms of the common characteristics of High Performance Learning Communities. High performing schools generally have a shared vision of excellence and equity; they develop a challenging curriculum with high expectations for all students and instruction that engages students to reach for excellence; they organize students and time to afford quality learning opportunities for staff and students alike; they create a collaborative school culture that enables the school to be a community of learners; and they actively involve their parents and community in student learning.

We say that schools that have all these elements of a High Performance Learning Community in place are in the highest or "Stage 3" of development. Stage 1, in contrast, represents the situation where schools are not function effectively. The system dynamics of Stage 1 schools consists of two situations. First, there is the truly dysfunctional school that has a hard time maintaining order, attracting and retaining a teaching staff, and creating an acceptable learning environment. Secondly, we find the under-performing school that cannot break its traditional ways because "the more things change the more they remain the same."

Stage 2 schools are quite different. They have made concrete steps toward comprehensive reform, even though they may not have clarity about their priorities, may have an uneven and less than school-wide approach to reform, and may struggle to implement change.

We say that Stage 1 schools lack the capacity and therefore the readiness for comprehensive reform. Stage 2 schools are ready for reform, though their path may not be steady or well formulated. Stage 3 schools have achieved a level of systemic change that is consistent with their students learning to high levels of performance and they have the capacity to sustain themselves at this high level.[6]

The HPLC Project has developed an assessment of the school's stage of development. The assessment uses rubric scores that are based on field visits using an evidence checklist and interview protocols.[7] In the full assessment, nineteen dimensions of school functioning are assessed under the five domains of High Performance Learning Communities outlined above. Each school receives a report based on these assessments. The school report accomplish three purposes. First, it points out a school's strengths and areas for further development. Second, it provides that school community with a concrete sense of the goals of comprehensive reform. Third, it opens a dialogue among the staff, the school's community, and the HPLC support team.

Figure 2 displays profiles of the study schools on the five critical aspects of high performance learning communities. The scale goes from 1 to 5, representing the range for

rubric scores that measure the school's status on realizing the ideal characteristics of high performance learning communities.[8] Scores in the 1 to 2 range are characteristic of a school with limited capacity for reform —that is, it is a Stage 1 school. Scores in the 2 to 4 ranges are typical of a school with enough capacity to be engaged in systemic reform — that is, a Stage 2 school. Scores in the 4 to 5 ranges signify a Stage 3 school.

According to the rubric scores in Figure 2, none of the five schools were in the Stage 3 range. One school, Pine, clearly was in Stage 2 before we arrived on the scene. It was particularly strong in having a shared vision, though that vision did not confront real issues of equity at the school[9]. As the following sections describe, Pine had a focus on high standards and curriculum and the active involvement of large segments of the parent community.

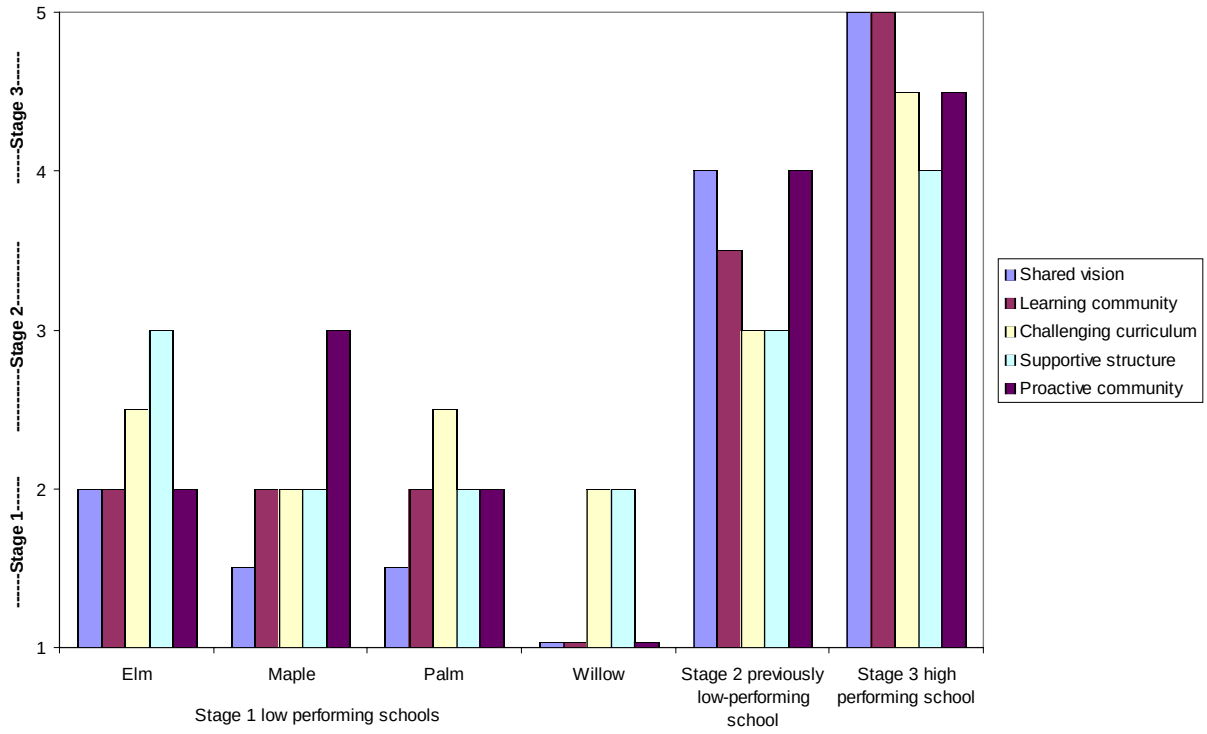
In contrast, Willow Middle School was dysfunctional in many ways (see the next section for details). Its consistently low scores provide evidence of their status as a Stage 1 school, not ready to take on reform.

Palm Elementary School had only one score above a 2 in the curriculum area. Though less dysfunctional than Willow, Palm nonetheless had much to overcome on the road to comprehensive reform, as we discuss subsequently.

Maple Middle School seemed more ready for change because of the active and supportive parent program at the school, but the school lacked a coherent and shared vision for their students. It is hard to imagine the school making much progress without a strong vision for change.

Elm Middle School had more capacity and better prospects. As a middle school, it had worked on its organizational structure and curriculum to better serve its students. It had an articulated vision for the education of all its students, though the vision was not yet widely shared by all staff and the community. With

Figure 2. Profiles of Schools Serving Low-income Students



some additional support, it could emerge fully as a Stage 2 school.

These profiles provide an overview of the *base-line capacity of the schools for reform.* Reform efforts seldom start with a clean slate. They begin with the "school as is" (its baseline systemic capacity) and must engage this systemic reality of the school. The next sections present a finer level of detail, focusing on those elements of capacity that are essential for the school to change from its baseline. We first discuss another critical factor — a school's leadership.

Skilled and distributed leadership

It takes skilled leadership to guide low-performing schools and get them ready for reform.[10] The study schools provide cases where leadership was —and was not— effective. Drawing on these situations as well as on the literature, we have identified key leadership skills and attributes that are particularly pertinent for mobilizing a school to be ready for comprehensive reform.[11] These skills and attributes are:

- the ability to identify, articulate and challenge staff to address specific issues and directions in the school;
- an openness to ideas and desires of others (e.g., other staff, parents, and students);
- implementation "know-how" —i.e., the skill to plan complex activities, design processes that elicit input and ensure good communication, guide follow-through activities, and work though barriers during implementation;
- the ability to "lead from behind" as well as from "in front;" and,
- the skill to foster "distributed leadership" by building leadership capacity in others.

For short hand, we call these qualities of "skilled and distributed leadership." When a school's leadership is skilled and distributed, it is more able to work through the steps and processes needed to prepare for comprehensive reform. Absent of such leadership a low-performing school's chances for finding and staying on a path to reform are dim indeed. The following examples illustrate the crucial nature of skilled and distributed leadership.

Table 2 on the previous page provides notes on each school's leadership as evidenced by the school's responses, actions and interactions under II/UPS. The top row of the table below the school names lists a simple assessment of each school's level of leadership capacity. High, mid and low indicate the categories for the assessment. High means the school leadership is skilled and distributed as defined above. The table shows two assessments, one for the leadership capacity prior to the Project's intervention under II/USP and the other after the intervention.

Effective Leadership. Pine Elementary School represents a school that had a strong leader who had shared leadership throughout the staff. The Pine Principal is a veteran educator who has been at the school for six years. When Pine began its planning work under the new state school improvement program, the Principal insisted that the school form a leadership team to guide the reform process. With herself as a vocal participant, she relied on that team to make key decisions that historically she had made. She relied on the leadership team to communicate the planning work to the whole staff and to identify the moments when input from the whole staff was needed before a decision could be made.

At one point in the work, staff buy-in to the planning process was in jeopardy because the staff was angry with a school needs assessment conducted by the external evaluator. The staff was hurt by the feedback they received and felt betrayed by the external team they had invited into their school. The staff's anger with both the content and the messenger threatened to derail their planning efforts. The Principal, with the help of the leadership team, facilitated a process that helped the staff overcome this challenge.

Table 2. Assessing the Schools' Capacity for Comprehensive Reform: Notes on Skilled and Distributed Leadership

Pine ES		Palm ES		Elm MS		Maple MS		Willow MS	
Pre -mid	**Post** -high	**Pre** -low	**Post** -low	**Pre** -mid	**Post** -mid	**Pre** -mid	**Post** -mid	**Pre** -low	**Post** -low
Veteran Principal who has been at the school for 6 years. Tends to be collaborative and inclusive, although strategic about when to include staff in decision-making. Saw need to build leadership capacity of staff. When staff upset by Needs Assessment, Principal organized 2 staff meetings: one for staff to talk with each other; one to allow them to formally articulate their concerns to the external evaluators. At two crucial moments when staff buy-in to the process could have been lost (when needs assessment upset them and when their priorities were challenged), the Principal pushed them to work through, express their concerns … Out of this the leadership team learned new skills for being leaders. Leadership became more distributed. Effective work with parents/community. Leadership led to almost full staff buy-in.		Principal in 2nd year at this school, with over 20 years of experience. Principal most sensitive to staff resistance, careful not to provoke this. Generally did not challenge people to address specific problems. Not a careful communicator: counted on people to retain what was discussed in meetings with little follow-up in writing. Principal expected a few key people to participate. His experience that smaller planning team betters for getting a plan done. Principal understood key elements to address to get work done (get modest staff buy-in and don't let activities get too large). Compliance driven. Principal would not demand or push for broader participation from staff because they had done PQR last year and did not want to draw away from classroom. Principal would seek the involvement only of parents and community who were already involved at site. Leadership led to limited buy-in.		Veteran Principal in her 4th year at school. Skilled AP who extends Principal's capacity. Considerable knowledge and expertise in schooling, and committed to the idea of a Leadership Team. But has not devolved leadership and decision-making to staff. Consequent frustration and dependence from the staff. Leadership team had existed for some time, but clearly were not capable (yet) nor given the opportunity to lead. Principal appears to lack some capacity or willingness to promote staff leadership. Tends to take over discussions and exert control over ideas raised. By end of process, planning team built considerable capacity to lead improvement effort. Works well with parents/community, but inconsistently allows their participation in decision-making. Leadership led to mixed staff buy-in.		Principal in 8th year at this school. Skilled AP who extends Principal's capacity. Principal not a strong challenging voice in planning work with staff, but was listener and participant. Alert to power of his position in these moments. More forceful in shaping the work in the smaller planning groups. Did not push whole staff to address certain challenges, but would do so in the smaller planning groups. Open to staff ideas and desires, but careful to edit out "naïve" or "unworkable" ideas. Counselor assigned role of ensuring that staff was well informed, had minutes from meetings. Principal pushed for full involvement of staff, but unwilling to require because of existing demands on young staff (many working on credentials…). Supported processes that gained involvement of 2/3 of staff. Principal effective in securing good community involvement, not so in parent involvement.		Principal in 1st year at school, with no prior experience. APs not efficient in their responsibilities. Admin team divided and has no system for communicating. Attempted leadership team, but not functioning. Principal not a strong challenging voice in planning work with staff: passive; unwilling to raise issues; unable to push significant staff participation. Unable/unwilling to exert leadership toward building a common vision of reform or of excellence/equity. Leadership work with parents/community is limited… Leadership led to almost no staff buy-in.	

They organized two meetings — one meeting to allow the staff to vent their anger and organize their thinking and another meeting for staff to present their concerns and feedback to the external evaluators. The process provided an opportunity for an honest and open exchange between the staff and the evaluators and for the staff's differing perspectives to be incorporated into an analysis of the school's needs. But the Principal also made certain that the staff did not shy away from the critique. She helped her staff understand the concerns raised by the external evaluators and challenged her staff to address these issues in their planning work.

This Principal demonstrated an ability to be both a skilled and inclusive leader. She both directed her staff and followed their lead. She acted strategically, choosing among and balancing different management approaches to guide her school toward planned goals. Her skill and understanding provided Pine with important capacity to work efficiently and overcome barriers. Moreover, the process of dealing with this "crisis" empowered the school leadership team to build its capacity.

Ineffective Leadership. Leadership at Willow Middle School was almost the mirror image of Pine. When Willow began its planning work under the same state school improvement program as Pine, the Principal was in her first full year and had no prior experience. The school's administrative team, composed of the Principal and two Assistant Principals, communicated poorly and did not act in a coordinated fashion. The school had formed a leadership team, but the team did not meet regularly and had no clear charge.

As the planning unfolded, the Principal lacked the skills to manage this work. In meetings, she was quiet and unwilling to raise specific issues or concerns. She would share information she was privileged to, as a result of her position, but did not provide guidance. Staff buy-in to this planning process was poor, and the Principal appeared unwilling or unable to push for broader participation. Among those who were motivated to participate, including staff, parents, and community, the political in-fighting for control of the process was intense. The Principal appeared intimidated by this politicking and exerted no real influence over it. During meetings, the passions of stakeholders often ran high as they struggled to address the many needs of Willow. The work often bogged down in these moments, and the Principal demonstrated little skill in moving the planning through these barriers.

Clearly the Principal at Willow did not demonstrate the ability to be a skilled and inclusive leader. She neither directed her staff nor mobilized them to take leadership. Her lack of skill and understanding left Willow with little capacity to work efficiently and overcome barriers.

Central versus Distributed Leadership. The examples of leadership at Pine and Willow define two ends of the continuum of leadership capacity. The other schools had leadership capacity that placed them somewhere in between.

For example, Elm Middle School had a veteran administrative team with considerable knowledge and expertise in schooling. They were skilled leaders who guided and pushed their staff to address the challenges facing a school with increasing numbers of low-income youth. They were open to staff ideas and desires, but they were committed to a pedagogical approach that was shared by only roughly half of the staff. Several years ago these administrators decided to distribute leadership in the school and form a leadership team. However, the leadership team never became a truly collaborative decision-making body. Administration appeared unwilling to devolve authority, and consequently the team appeared reluctant to take leadership. Whether deliberately or not, administrators left the leadership team's roles and responsibilities ambiguous. While the Principal clearly respected and used input of the group, she exerted strict control over discussions and

decisions made. This central leadership was not distributed, making it difficult for Elm to engage in comprehensive reform.

Collaborative structures and processes

Getting ready for reform requires ongoing and schoolwide collaborative processes that enable schools to create a shared vision of what must be done and how it is to done (that is, a concrete action plan). Schools with institutionalized collaborative structures generally have representative planning teams that assume responsibility for assigned tasks to complete work efficiently; a decision-making structure that ensures full participation in the planning work; and, time for the staff to plan and support each other.

Institutionalized Collaboration. Table 3 on the next page summarizes each school's capacity for collaboration. As mentioned above, Pine established a leadership team to manage the planning process for the school. That team met once a week to review the reform strategies being developed, to plan working sessions with the whole staff, and to share staff feedback from previous sessions. The team served as the central structure for staff collaboration about reform, pulling together input generated formally in the less-frequent staff meetings and informally in daily conversations within the school.

When the state improvement program required that the school establish a School-Community Team (SCT), Pine was already well organized to tap parent, community, and district collaboration. The school had an active parent group, and it had a Latino parent group that was organized to address issues specifically affecting Latino students. Members of these groups brought their knowledge, focus, and experience in working with the school to the SCT. The school also had strong relations with individual district administrators, and three of these brought their knowledge, focus, and experience to the SCT. The SCT met every other week and served as a key resource and a review body for the planning conducted by the staff. Each key group—the whole staff, the leadership team, and the SCT—managed to stake out time and areas of responsibility that enabled them to collaborate and complement each other's efforts. Once Pine's reform plan was written, the staff as a whole and members of the SCT returned to their previous roles, clear about the reform priorities and prepared to support those priorities. The leadership team, it appears, had evolved into a set of working groups, which will be responsible for implementing different areas of their plan. These collaborative structures and processes provided Pine with the crucial capacity associated with a higher readiness to engage in comprehensive reform.

Lack of Institutionalized Collaboration. In contrast, Palm Elementary School had no established staff leadership team and did not establish one as part of its reform planning work. The Principal sought staff input on school-wide matters during weekly staff meetings, but rarely assigned staff responsibility for managing school-wide improvement efforts. Various collaborative planning teams came and went, driven by external mandates, but they had no sustained life within the school. The same, small number of teachers typically sat on each of these collaborative teams partly because they were willing to contribute the extra volunteer time after school and on weekends and partly because the Principal knew they were efficient but not overly demanding.

The Principal at Palm was concerned about two issues that affected schoolwide collaboration: (a) the staff being asked to take on responsibilities that were not classroom focused and (b) the staff developing any organized resistance to the Principal's authority. Staff meetings, therefore, were organized to keep people informed but not to demand substantive planning work. Staff was never challenged with specific problems in the operations or effectiveness of the school, nor organized to address these problems. The Principal was

Table 3. Assessing the Schools' Capacity for Comprehensive Reform: Notes on Collaborative Structure and Processes for Comprehensive Planning

Pine ES		Palm ES		Elm MS		Maple MS		Willow MS	
Pre -mid	**Post** -high	**Pre** -low	**Post** -low	**Pre** -low	**Post** -mid	**Pre** -low	**Post** -mid	**Pre** -low	**Post** -low
Had no established structures of decision-making and planning, prior to II/USP. Principal used process to establish a Leadership Team. Immediately began to operate effectively. LT helped to establish the SCT. Principal created committees that will work on different areas of the action plan. Active parent group established before the improvement effort. Latino parents' group too. Principal appears to know how to use these structures and processes.		Structures in place, but they were not effectively used. General resistance to collaborative processes focused on "act and reflect…". Very little capacity. Wed. whole-staff meeting time available, but Principal/staff unwilling to give enough of this time. Work often competed with other agenda items. Some pre-existing collaboration teams (circuit teams, last year's PQR team, and SSC), but no permanent team that was the logical location for such inquiry. Core planners "reluctantly" willing to meet outside normal hours. Principal appears unwilling to use these structures and processes.		Leadership team had existed for some time, but clearly not capable (at that time) nor given the opportunity to lead. School lacks processes for pulling together to meet a common goal and accept responsibility for improving student achievement. Wed. early release time available. Limited engagement during this time. Core planning team willing to work extended hours with compensation. Enthusiastically engaged in the process. By end of process, planning team built considerable capacity to lead improvement effort. Still working out processes of communication between the planning group and the whole staff. Not clear if Principal will use these structures and processes effectively.		Structures in place, but they were not effectively used. Strong openness to inquiry work, tapping good capacity of individuals. Wednesday staff meeting time used effectively to promote full buy-in and regular communication. No pre-existing reliable planning teams to locate this work. Founded a planning group willing to work extended hours, with compensation (afternoons and weekends). Enthusiastically engage in this process, which bodes well for future. Potential that Principal will use these structures and processes effectively.		Despite the significant discipline issues, there are no mechanisms for discussing them with the staff. Structures in place, but they were not effectively used. Any existing processes are constantly undermined by the crisis response management style and by the teacher turnover. No procedures or structures through which school communicated with parents. Concerted effort (dinner meeting, reminder calls, and stipends) ultimately produced a core of 10 parents involved in planning work. Some pre-existing collaboration teams (SSC), but no permanent team that was the logical location for such inquiry. Developed Discipline team—area where there was considerable concern and interest. Wed. early release time available and staff willing to give over this time. Staff willing to do Saturday retreat. But participation never was complete and dropped off as the work became more detailed. Principal does not know how to use structures and processes effectively.

always ready to assume responsibility for work, even though he was clearly overwhelmed by the tasks and showed poor follow-through.

When the state improvement program began, Palm established the SCT, as required. This structure proved to be merely symbolic. Palm had a few parents and community people who worked at the school and were available to participate on the SCT with a minimum of fuss. While these people were active in the school as individuals and brought important knowledge, they did not have crucial experience in working with the school as a part of a group. They were unfamiliar with group processes and unaware of the role that collective external voice can have in reform work. In effect, they showed up to comply with the state mandate and resumed their individual efforts once the planning was completed.

Absent of institutionalized structure and processes, Palm was not able to put in place the school and community wide collaboration that comprehensive reform demands.

School Willingness

In addition to school capacity, a school's willingness to engage in reform is a pre-condition to bring together the forces that must be mobilized for a comprehensive effort. The cases suggest that schools could not produce a viable action plan unless they had a sense of urgency and buy-in to the process of reform.

Urgency for reform

Comprehensive reform is about changing attitudes as well as practices. To be ready to engage in comprehensive reform, low performing schools must develop a widely shared sense that change must happen. This sense of urgency is akin to feelings of distress, frustration, and "we've got to do something about it … NOW." The opposite of organizational urgency is either complacency that a school is doing a "good enough" job in educating its students or resignation that it can do nothing to educate its students more effectively.

Table 4. Assessing the School's Willingness for Comprehensive Reform: Notes on a Sense of Urgency

Pine ES		Palm ES		Elm MS		Maple MS		Willow MS	
Pre -mid	**Post** -high	**Pre** -low	**Post** -mid	**Pre** -mid	**Post** -high	**Pre** -low	**Post** -high	**Pre** -low	**Post** -low
Urgency built on their general commitment to help students. As they got into details of action plan, the sense of urgency increased --that is, as they got closer to the actual steps they would be taking to address the challenges they had identified. Even when tired, they had high level of enthusiasm for improving student achievement.		Principal: "You know this is not the only important demand being placed on us." Expresses a desire for reform rooted in a sense of responsibility for taking immediate steps, but not actually urgency. Staff mirrored this in general. No sense of urgency. But there were outliers on either end, with some expressing urgency and others expressing complacency and belief that they were not the ones who had to take the first step.		Clear that most staff felt a sense of urgency for reform. But fewer accepted that it was their responsibility to change the school and their practices. Some staff felt it was up to the administration or the students/parents who needed to change.		The strongest sense of urgency comes from the staff—young teachers who want to do well by the kids and are well aware they won't do it under current situation. It's a mixed sense of urgency, to change learning conditions and working conditions. No clear sense of urgency from the leadership. Strong feelings that the district had to take step, but also a willingness to take immediate steps.		Sense of urgency exists among some staff to change what everybody recognizes is a dysfunctional organization. More powerful and dominant sense that it is somebody else's responsibility to take the first steps or strong belief that the first steps that would really matter would have to come from the district. If much urgency existed, it waned as got into the details of the action plan.	

From Complacency to Urgency. Table 4 provides notes on each school's sense of urgency. We rated Pine as mid range in this dimension at the time of the baseline. The school staff began its planning work with a broad-based professional commitment to help all students, but also felt that the school was already doing a good job (despite the fact that their students, particularly students of color, scored below the state average). The first task as evaluators was to shine a spotlight of data on the staff's assumptions. Our evaluation pointed to a consistent pattern of low test-scores for students of color. This negative finding sparked an intense and defensive reaction that was channeled toward us as evaluators. Ultimately, the staff let the evidence be heard clearly. Its basic belief in equity fueled a determination to confront the challenge we had identified. As the staff moved into formulating an action plan, that determination increased and deepened. As each action was clearly identified and linked to raising student performance for all students, the staff was eager to tackle the hard work of reform.

From Despair to Urgency. For many years, the learning and working conditions at Maple Middle School had been extremely difficult. The level of disorder and disruption was high, academic achievement low. Students were frustrated and acted out. Many teachers and administrators were unhappy, remaining at the school only a short time. However, in the year that the state intervention program began, the situation changed. The administration had stabilized and was open to fresh ideas. Each staff member, particularly those who were new to teaching, saw the state program and our work with the school as an opportunity to change the difficult circumstances they all confronted. The collaborative process of envisioning reform fed on itself and soon a sense of urgency—a feeling that "we've got to try"—took over.

Mired in Despair. Willow Middle School also had poor learning and working conditions—disorder, disruption, low achievement, student frustration, and teacher turnover. The staff and community recognized that Willow was dysfunctional and in need of reform. However that recognition did not translate into urgency for reform. Unlike Maple, where the staff was willing to assume responsibility for changing the school, the staff at Willow generally said it was the district's or the state's or somebody else's responsibility. Unlike Pine, when this school moved into planning, only a few people became engaged. Any excitement that emerged even in this limited group waned as people grew discouraged about the prospects for implementing whatever plan they developed.

Buy-in to the process for reform

In the state intervention program, school staff and community had to agree to a planning process imposed by the state. The prescribed framework required schools to collaborate with an external evaluator; accept that improvement in their performance would be determined only by student standardized test performance; and submit a reform action plan for approval by both their district and the state. Under these circumstances, staff resistance to the process is understandable, but self-defeating. Unless a school could buy in to the process, accepting it in more than a symbolic way, the chances for this process working was slim. Schools that demonstrated buy-in under these circumstances showed a willingness to set aside doubts, either about the external mandate or about the internal barriers to change, and saw the state evaluation and planning process as an opportunity to undertake comprehensive change.

The Art of Getting and Maintaining Buy-in. Table 5 provides notes about each school's buy-in to a comprehensive reform process. We turn once again to Pine as an example of a middle-to-high end case of buy-in. In response to the II/USP, the Principal at Pine took the position that the program represented an opportunity to focus the school's attention on improvement, bring staff together around a common plan, and build leadership capacity. She

Table 5. Assessing the Schools' Willingness for Comprehensive Reform: Notes on Buy-in to a Reform Process

Pine ES		Palm ES		Elm MS		Maple MS		Willow MS	
Pre -mid	**Post** -mid	**Pre** -low	**Post** -mid	**Pre** -low	**Post** -high	**Pre** -low	**Post** -mid	**Pre** -low	**Post** -low
Principal sees process as opportunity to devote focused attention to school improvement issues, bring staff together, and build leadership capacity of teachers. A sense that "we to do this anyway, we might as well have time and money for it." Principal extremely knowledgeable about legislation and processes. Principal focused on promoting staff buy-in. At 2 crucial moments when staff buy-in to the process could have been lost (when needs assessment upset them and when their priorities were challenged), the Principal pushed them to work through, express their concerns … Buy-in waffled a bit when staff raised concerns that too much was being planned, but planning process addressed their concerns. Helped them see they had the capacity to implement.		8 Core staff willing to work outside the scheduled staff meeting times. Noticeable absence of AA teachers; only 1. Core staff bought in as long as work Drew on PQR. Never bought in to the larger notion of whole-school reform. Principal interested in limited buy-in to get the job done, but not committed to the notion of full buy-in necessary for effective reform.		Core of staff strongly bought in, but perhaps equally strong resistance too. Many recognized the needs that had to be addressed to improve student performance and thought this process could address them. Others were skeptical. Parent/community buy-in mixed. Core of parents/community committed to process, but overall very limited involvement.		Principal was clearly eager to use this process as a chance to tie the pieces together. Whole school reform would finally coordinate the many efforts. Wanted to get staff buy-in to facilitate getting everybody "on the same page". Staff in general was bought in, seeing this as a key opportunity to make big changes. Buy-in was somewhat tempered by the difficulties of their working conditions and how it caused some to question their overall commitment to the school.		[[Difference from Maple may be due to Leadership conditions and history/culture of place, shaped by individual teacher leaders….]] Staff in general not bought in to this process. Hampered by the difficulties of their working conditions that caused them to question their overall commitment to the school. Teacher turnover a problem too. Young, uncredentialed teachers who did not have the time and energy to engage in the process. Other than one teacher, none were willing/able to advocate on behalf of particular reforms. Key union leader opposed to the accountability process "imposed" by the state (critique: reform focused on school rather than on district). Except where the process might lead to funding of computer program he wanted. In addition, internal political in-fighting between this teacher leader and the administration led to opposition to process "led" by the Principal. Parent concern and unhappiness with the state of the school led to strong, albeit often opposed buy-in to the reform process. Process only intensified their buy-in and commitment to seeing the school improve (volunteered to serve as an oversight body to ensure implementation).

persuaded her staff that this work was something they had to do anyway and that they might as well have the money to do it. There were moments in their planning work when staff buy-in began to fail because individuals were concerned they were taking on too much. In response, the leadership team identified elements of the reform plan that were extensions of their current work as opposed to new elements. This step reassured staff that they had the capacity to implement the new strategies.

No Buy-in, No Reform. Willow, not surprisingly, showed a lack of buy-in. In the ideal, buy-in should be shared schoolwide, but a school can also be ready if it has the buy-in of a core staff. Willow lacked even this core buy-in. Few teachers would commit themselves to working at Willow the next year, let alone buy-in to a reform agenda. Most of the school administration also expected they would not return next year.

Summary of Pre-Conditions for Reform

This chapter presented a framework for understanding pre-conditions for engaging in comprehensive reform. At one level, a school is ready if it can develop an action plan for systemic change that has a reasonably high chance of being implemented. At deeper organizational and motivational levels, a school is ready if and only if it has the capacity and willingness to undertake a complex, time-consuming, and intense change process. A school's stage of development, its leadership, and its collaborative processes define its capacity to engage in a comprehensive planning process. Willingness implies that the staff and the community have a sense of urgency about reform and buy in to the planning process and its subsequent outcome—namely, a schoolwide shared vision that can serve as the basis for an action plan for systemic change.

The chapter reviewed how each school in the state program stood on these pre-conditions. Clearly but not surprisingly, the schools varied greatly in their readiness. Consequently, the challenge for outside intervention is to use strategies that are geared to a school's context and can improve its readiness. The next chapter describes the strategies we used and explores their effectiveness.

III. Building Readiness with HPLC Support Strategies

The last section described the context and state of readiness of five II/USP schools. This section describes support strategies that RPP used to increase readiness and help these schools develop an action plan. The HPLC Project developed the strategies, and their application in these cases is a test of the replicability of the strategies in the setting of low-performing schools operating under a state mandated accountability and improvement process. We begin by describing the change in readiness that occurred under the intervention. From the perspective of impact, the change in readiness attests to the effectiveness of the replication strategies.

Mapping Pre- and Post-Intervention Readiness

Both school capacity and willingness are pre-conditions of the readiness of schools to undertake comprehensive reform. In reality, these conditions are not separate, but function together. Table 6 maps the five schools along both dimensions. The table presents our assessment of the readiness of these low-performing schools after and after our work with them. The ratings of capacity and willingness are composites. For capacity, they include our assessments of a school's stage of development, its leadership, and its collaborative structures and processes. For willingness, they include a school's sense of urgency and buy-in to the reform process.

As the table indicates, none of these low-performing schools were at a high level in both capacity and willingness when we first began to support them. Pine had the highest levels, meriting a middle level in willingness and capacity. Yet, this school was not fully ready to undertake reform until after the support period when they had built capacity and willingness to a high/ high level. Our support task was thus to help the five low-performing schools build readiness by using strategies that explicitly targeted the particular challenges affecting willingness and capacity.

The state's charge under the II/USP called for RPP to provide low-performing schools with an assessment of their needs and to help them

Table 6. School Readiness Pre- and Post-intervention

		***Pre*-Intervention**				***Post*-Intervention**		
		Capacity				**Capacity**		
		Low	**Middle**	**High**		**Low**	**Middle**	**High**
Willingness	***Low***	Willow Palm Maple			***Low***	Willow *(pre was low, low)*		
	Middle	Elm	Pine		***Middle***	Palm *(pre was low, low)*	Maple *(pre was low, low)*	
	High				***High***		Elm *(pre was mid, low)*	Pine *(pre was mid, mid)*

develop a detailed plan for improvement. We went beyond this requirement and used several support strategies to build capacity and willingness. The left side of Table 6 presents our assessment of the readiness of the schools *after* these strategies had been used and an action plan had been developed. The readiness of four of the five schools improved, though they improved in different ways.

No Improvement. Willow Middle School had the lowest levels and did not show substantial improvement on either willingness or capacity, despite RPP's support strategies that proved to be successful in other settings. The leadership in Willow was extremely weak; the staff divided and demoralized; the community frustrated and uncertain how it could force change; and many teachers and administrators were likely to leave. We believe that the school cannot go forward unless the district (or ultimately the state) takes bold steps regarding school leadership and the stability of the school staff. Only with such strong actions can the district demonstrate its commitment to the community — and to the students.

More Time, More Support, More Pressure. Palm Elementary School started from low willingness/low capacity and improved only its willingness to implement reform. Though we judge the school not yet ready to undertake comprehensive reform, the staff had a real shift in its sense of urgency and buy-in to a process of reform. This school's next step would be to strengthen its capacity, which in turn could help promote more willingness on the part of the staff and community. Despite Palm's progress, it is unreasonable in *a short time* to expect to transform this discouraged low-performing school into one that could take off on a solid path to comprehensive change. More time, more support, continued pressure, and demonstrable commitment from the district are needed.

Maple Middle School improved in both willingness and capacity, going from low willingness, low capacity to a middle level in both dimensions. This increase signifies substantial improvement and hope, particularly among the young teachers at the school. Yet, this gain was not enough to believe that Maple could be successful without an intensive outside and district support over at least another year or two.

Elm Middle School started at a middle level of willingness. Indeed, it had an enthusiastic core planning team in place. But it also had a low level of capacity, with a lack of collaborative structures and processes and a leadership team that was not functional. The intervention helped build its leadership capacity and collaborative structures. Its responsiveness to change bodes well for its future. Yet, that future will take time, for the school's capacity needs more support to become ready to undertake comprehensive reform. By building such capacity, the school could address the issues of getting buy-in from the whole staff.

Attaining Readiness. Pine Elementary School began the state imposed planning process at a much higher level of readiness than the other schools. This higher level made it easier for the intervention to help Pine attain a full readiness in both willingness and capacity. Since Pine had to overcome a sense of complacency about the quality of its school, the HPLC support strategies and required planning process helped the staff break through its subtle resistance to change in only five months. A heightened sense of urgency and a more distributed leadership portend a solid path for future improvement. The intervention thus became an opportunity for Pine to go forward with an action plan that is likely to result in genuine gains in student achievement for their students of color as well as all its other students.

HPLC Support Strategies

These improvements (as well as the lack of improvements) are the result of each school's response to the imposed state planning process and the application of RPP's support strategies.

Table 7 shows an overview of RPP's comprehensive reform model developed in the High Performance Learning Communities (HPLC) Project. The Project has developed tools, methods, materials, and strategies to support schools to learn six essential skills and habits of mind for continuous improvement, which are listed in the first column. We use a scaffold of support having the elements displayed in the second row (Consortium meetings, coaching, technical assistance, school-to-school visits, and a technology network) to tailor support to each school's needs and context. The HPLC approach works to build and sustain a school's capacity to select and effectively implement strategies that best serve its needs.[12]

We adapted the HPLC strategies that are shaded in the table for the II/USP intervention.[13] The short time frame and limited resources for the planning process meant that the full range of strategies could not be employed. We selected those strategies that would best accomplish a needs assessment, planning process and action plan, while building capacity and willingness in the targeted way outlined in the preceding section. The remainder of this chapter describes how these strategies worked.

Using data-based inquiry

To begin the planning work, we engaged each school in a process we call *data-based inquiry* (DBI).[14] In DBI, schools use a wide variety of student performance data (e.g., standardized assessment data, authentic assessment data, and grade data) to understand how well students are learning; analyze areas of weakness and/or inequity in student performance; identify challenges and priorities for improvement; and develop goals for improvement. The HPLC DBI process uses a series of tools and procedures developed and tested in the HPLC Consortium. We facilitated DBI in structured ways that paced staff through a cycle of inquiry. In doing so, we focused schools on their achievement and equity challenges and therefore on the central task of improving student learning.

DBI and Building Collaborative Processes. The way presented and facilitated, DBI aimed at increasing readiness, particularly in regards to establishing authentic collaboration in the schools. When we began supporting the five schools, we found that administrators had generally examined student performance data and formed ideas about how to address the school's

Table 7. Overview of the HPLC Comprehensive Reform Model

	Scaffold of Project Supports				
HPLC Support Strategies ***Building Six Essential Skills and Habits of Mind for Continuous Improvement***	**Consortium meetings**	**Coaching**	**Technical assistance**	**School-to-school visits**	**Technology network**
1. Planning for whole-school change based on HPLC Principles	✔	✔	✔		
2. Using data-based inquiry in a cycle of school improvement	✔	✔	✔		
3. Addressing equity as central to excellence	✔	✔			
4. Learning to adopt and adapt strategies that work	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
5. Building the know-how to implement change	✔	✔	✔		
6. Developing a collaborative infrastructure for continuously improving classroom practice	✔	✔		✔	✔

performance challenges. In doing so, however, they rarely brought their staff into the inquiry. Consequently, they had "gotten ahead" of their staff. They had not developed a process whereby their staff could develop its own ideas that could support, strengthen or alter the leaders' thinking.

For example, in the one school, Pine, where the Principal already enjoyed the support and respect of her staff, this lack of inclusiveness in the use of data may have contributed to the staff's shocked surprise about the systematic low-performance of some groups of students. In the other cases, this omission was more serious. The reality that the leadership was "ahead" of the staff in being systematically aware of the poor performance outcomes served to undermine an already tenuous staff support of the school leadership — and thus the school's capacity for reform. The process of data-based inquiry closed this gap.

We created the opportunities and necessity for staff to share a common understanding with the leadership about the school's challenges. Arriving at this common understanding re-shaped the thinking of administrators and strengthened staff support for their leadership.

We intentionally presented DBI in ways that modeled effective collaboration. In several schools, planning teams learned the HPLC process steps, worked their way through DBI, and used the DBI tools to work together, talk through emotionally charged issues, and stay focused on student achievement (versus adult working conditions). The beliefs and assumptions of individuals involved in the change process were discussed, critiqued, and ultimately transformed, into concrete school improvement goals and a detailed plan for reaching those goals. In effect, data-based inquiry had given them practice with the collaborative structures and processes needed for engaging in comprehensive reform.

We also used DBI to help each school build a shared willingness to learn together in preparation for developing a reform plan. At the beginning of our work, teachers and administrators alike had vague ideas about the general performance of their students as compared to a state or national norm. Few teachers knew performance outcomes in enough depth to define the school's challenges or set schoolwide learning goals for all students. Or when they did have a sense of overall achievement, the staff did not know the differences in achievement among different groups of students. The DBI process surfaced these performance "facts' to staff in ways they could understand, reflect on and create a commonly shared meaning for the school. This process of learning together built a shared sense of urgency that their school was not doing a satisfactory job.

DBI to Empower Staff. DBI's collaborative process helps a school set and concretely define the progress they and the state expected of students. Participating in this process gave staff a sense of efficacy—that they could make the changes that would yield real improvement. This growing feeling of efficacy engendered a commitment to the process. And while many staff remained skeptical of standardized assessment data, data-based inquiry gave them an opportunity to see how even this problematic evidence could be useful for planning and internal accountability purposes.

Finally, in several schools, the data analysis naturally led to discussion of an improved system of student assessment. Teams talked about using or developing school-based student performance data that would give them better evidence of the impact of their work on student learning. In effect, teams took some control over the tools that generally, as they see it, are used against them. In the schools where it worked, this inquiry and planning engendered greater buy-in to the process of reform because the schools saw the value in evaluating their efforts using measures of student performance that they found meaningful.

DBI to Empower the Community. We employed DBI where possible with parent and community members to bring outside stakeholders into the planning process. In so doing, parents had an opportunity to convey their own sense of urgency grounded in the concrete evidence of student performance data. In Elm and Maple, DBI also helped staff and community bridge differences between them. Absent of this structured and facilitated process, the staff and community fell into a pattern of unproductive blaming. When DBI moved from analysis of past performance to defining goals for future performance, their separate reasons for urgency were merged into a common commitment to school improvement.

Collaborative planning using comprehensive research-based principles

When the time was right at each school, we shifted the planning process from data inquiry to setting goals. At this point, we introduced the research-based HPLC Principles (Section 1 for a brief overview of the content of the Principles) as a means for the schools to develop a vision of a high performing school. The HPLC Principles consists of a set of research-based characteristics of effective schools. The Principles describe five core aspects of high performing and equitable schools: their vision of high expectations for all students; their curriculum and instructional practices; the way they organize students and time; their culture of decision-making and learning; and their parent and community relationships.

Understanding Comprehensive Reform. Schools can use the Principles in various ways to reflect on and improve their planning and practice. The very process of making meaning of the Principles of High Performance Learning Communities in their own contexts engages schools in a process of clarifying their goals and values with regard to teaching, learning, and the notion of "excellence for all." Importantly, the Principles include explicit ways to think about equity. Introducing these HPLC Principles to schools as possibly their goals promotes reflection, greater awareness of the meaning of comprehensive reform, and understanding of equity.

However, Fullan (1991) reminds us that the purpose of comprehensive reform is to help schools accomplish their goals more effectively by replacing some structures, programs, and/or practices with better ones. Therefore, school must do more than like new ideas—they must "behave their way into new ideas" (Fullan, 1993, p. 15). Before schools can behave in ways that reflect new ideas, they need clear images in the form of powerful examples to accompany the principles (Jubb, 1999).[15]

The HPLC Project has developed such examples in the form of rubrics that can be used to assess how well a school is progressing along the lines of the HPLC Principles. The rubrics, which we call the HPLC Principles Assessment Tool, are designed as a strategy for schools to self-assess their strengths and areas for development. They are also intended for use by an external team to assess schools' progress toward comprehensive reform.[16] By comparing its self-assessment with that of the external team, schools develop a grounded meaning of comprehensive reform in their context and can set priorities that focus their efforts to improve equity and achievement.

Comprehensive Assessment helps Build Willingness and Capacity. We assessed each of the five low-performing schools using the Principles Assessment Tool (PAT) and shared the results with them. We then asked the school teams to engage in their own self-assessment for several domains of the Principles. Teams discussed the self-assessments both to identify the causes for the achievement challenges they had defined in their DBI and to generate potential solutions to address these challenges. In those schools where the process was fully followed, the beliefs and perceptions of individuals involved in the change process were discussed, critiqued, and ultimately merged, this

time into concrete set of ideas about how to improve the school.

The Principles Assessment had afforded them the opportunity to work collectively from research-based ideas, debating the merits of different proven strategies, rather than the merits of individual ideas. As with data-based inquiry, the Principles Assessment gave them practice with the collaborative structures and processes needed to engage in comprehensive reform.

The Principles Assessment also built the schools' willingness to engage in reform. At Pine, the Principles Assessment sparked anger and resentment among the staff, specifically in the area of equity. The feedback from us contradicted their own assumptions of their school and their work. The Principles Assessment however provided concrete examples of conditions crucial to excellence and equity that were missing or under-developed in this school. Once the staff had worked through their anger about this feedback, they became committed to remedying the weaknesses identified in the Principles Assessment. The Assessment stimulated a sense of urgency to address equity that had not been there prior to the intervention.

Seeing the Whole and Sharing the Vision. Across all the schools, participants in the inquiry process came to the table knowledgeable about certain aspects of high performing schools. Staff usually had some understanding of the impact of challenging curriculum on student performance; parents and community often understood the impact they can have on student achievement. Though participants understood some aspects of a high performing school, they usually lacked a picture of the whole. The Principles Assessment helped them gain a broader vision. In this context of understanding, discussions became less about competing strategies for improvement in specific areas of expertise and more about developing strategies which addressed all the domains of a high performance learning community. Buy-in was built not simply because there was "something for everybody," but because people could see how individual strands had to work together to lift the whole.

The HPLC approach to coaching

The support strategy that tied the DBI and Principles Assessment process together was school coaching.

Coaching Supports Collaboration and Distributed Leadership. We designed the coaching to be flexible and tailored to each school setting. For example, in several schools, skilled *and* distributed leadership was not present. In these situations, the coaches facilitated the improvement process, thereby affording administrators the opportunity to assume a different role in the change work. A few school Principals took advantage of that opportunity to interact with the staff from a less-controlling stance. Their communication and collaboration consequently changed. Some staff stepped forward to take on new leadership responsibilities. Others simply took advantage of the opportunity to be more honest and direct with their Principals, which resolved substantial barriers to reform. In several stages of the planning work, Principals, as members of the team rather than the leader, assumed the position of one expert among many. Their leadership shifted to a kind of leadership from " beside" or "behind." These interactions and shifts in the traditional dynamic laid the foundation in schools such as Maple, Palm, and Pine for the development of skilled and distributed leadership.

Coaching Models Collaboration. Our coaching helped in another way. In three schools (Pine, Maple, and Elm), our demonstrated how to create and run collaboration. Through modeling effective facilitation and sharing reform research and experience, each school developed more skilled and knowledgeable staff leadership teams. Teachers assumed new leadership roles, particularly in soliciting input of the whole staff. In several instances, this occurred when we

urged Principals not to lead a particular activity and when we refused to lead the activity ourselves.

Coaching Supports Buy-in. The HPLC coaching approach also focused on building buy-in to the process of reform. Staff at all the schools felt unhappy with or openly resistant to the accountability mandate accompanying the state intervention. Being familiar with technical assistance that prescribed rather than supported, the faculty and administrators were skeptical of us. They saw us, at first, as agents of the state. As coaching proceeded however, practitioners revised their original predisposition. They came to feel that we were "critical friends." Our approach did not preclude us from confronting them with challenging evidence (Pine) or from insisting that certain collaborative steps had to happen (Maple and Elm). Regardless of the circumstances, we continued to be at every meeting helping them work through the resistance that our prodding created. This "doggedness" in itself engendered buy-in.

Ensemble Coaching Fosters Flexibility. Knowing that schools have a range of different needs that vary over time and across different actors, we followed an "ensemble coaching" strategy. Our coaches encompassed multiple expertise in evaluation, facilitation, and reform, along with different styles and personalities. Ensemble coaching, in which several coaches were responsible for each school, enabled us to play the roles needed in the moment. Such roles included the "counselor" who reassured, the external eyes that could view issues dispassionately, the "expert" who knew similar schools that had succeeded in their reform work, and the "resource broker" who could link the school with needed technical assistance. This flexibility enabled us to bring a full range of staff into the process and keep them there, strengthening the overall willingness of the school to engage in reform.

Summary

Of the various support strategies developed in the HPLC Project, we focused on three that could be applied in the short time frame of the state mandated improvement program, the II/USP, and were directly relevant to its purposes. The three strategies — data-based inquiry, collaborative planning based on HPLC Principles, and ensemble coaching — were adapted to the state program, but, more importantly, to the schools and their context. In particular, each strategy is composed of tools, procedures and materials that had been co-developed and tested with schools of the HPLC Consortium. The HPLC tools were applied more-or-less as is. The procedures for using the tools and their application varied according to a school's capacity (i.e., its stage of development, leadership, and presence of collaborative processes) and willingness (i.e., its sense of urgency and buy-in to a reform process). In addition to guiding schools towards an action plan for comprehensive reform, we chose the three support strategies and designed their application for the purpose of building the schools' readiness to engage in reform.

The effects of these strategies varied. The participating staff and community members at all the schools experienced each strategy as potent and appropriate for the program's purposes. HPLC's data-based inquiry process, the planing based on comprehensive, research-based principles, and the tailored ensemble coaching generally leveraged the strengths of the schools and increased their readiness to engage in whole-school reform in four out of the five schools.

The sole school that did not substantially increase in its readiness, Willow, was at a low stage of development, had severe leadership problems, a demoralized staff likely to leave the school, and a contentious relationship with its community. Though the staff and community members that participated in the intervention

processes felt they learned and, in some case, were deeply affected, the HPLC strategies could not overcome Willow's dysfunctional situation.

The other schools gained in their readiness, but in different ways and to different degrees. We judged only one school, Pine, to be fully ready to engage in comprehensive reform. This school started at a medium level of readiness. DBI, supported by coaching and the HPLC Principles-based planning process, was effective there. These strategies helped the school break through its complacency and focus with a sense of urgency and buy-in on a plan that addressed equity for all students as well as excellence for each student.

Much the same could be said of the other three schools. Their readiness increased substantially as a result of a combination of the three strategies working together. These three schools started at a lower level of readiness and moved quite far, but needed more time and continued assistance to reach full readiness.

IV. Five Lessons about the Readiness of Low-Performing Schools for Comprehensive Reform

The action-research described in this paper had two overlapping purposes. First, the Project sought to replicate HPLC support strategies in schools that had student test scores that were substantially below state averages. These HPLC strategies had been successful with schools in the HPLC Consortium. We wished to determine the conditions under which the strategies would be effective for chronically low-performing schools.

The research had a second goal. We wanted to explore the factors that prevent chronically low-performing schools from improving and gain insight into leverage points that could help them get started on a path toward comprehensive reform. This chapter draws lessons for policy about both replication and factors affecting the likelihood that chronically failing schools can substantially improve.

Lesson 1: Readiness for reform is a pre-condition for the effective adoption and implementation of whole-school change.

If this sample is indicative of the more general situation, many—perhaps most—chronically low-performing schools are not ready to tackle comprehensive reform. Said differently, readiness is a pre-condition for these schools to be able to attempt and make real progress on the demanding requirements for whole-school change. This lesson may seem obvious. Nonetheless, many state and local policies wrongly assume that a common policy or program can transform low-performing schools regardless of each school's challenges and particular circumstances.

Not only are some schools not ready to undertake comprehensive reform, but they are not ready in a variety of different ways. Readiness depends on the school's *capacity* to effectively engage in a comprehensive planning process. This aspect of organizational capacity consists of three conditions. The first is a school's *stage of development.* Dysfunctional schools have a hard time coping with immediate crisis, let alone develop and manage meaningful plans for comprehensive reform. The second aspect of capacity is the school's *leadership for change*, which should be skilled and distributed. The third element concerns the capacity of schools to organize and maintain *collaborative and inclusive processes* that are essential for developing a shared, school-wide action plan. School readiness also depends on the school's *willingness* to engage in a reform process. That is, the staff needs a real *sense of urgency* about reform and must *buy-in* to the planning process itself and the vision that the process generates.

We say that such capacity and willingness are pre-conditions because all are necessary. If a school falls short on any one of these pre-conditions, it is unlikely to be able to successfully engage in comprehensive change.

Lesson 2: Support strategies to increase readiness should be matched and mixed to fit a school's context and to build a school's stage of development, capacity and willingness.

Lesson 1 directly implies this second lesson. Providers of support to low-performing schools should focus on support strategies on those pre-conditions that need strengthening. Public policy in turn should enable schools and their providers to tailor their support to the context conditions of readiness at the school.

The action-research found that interventions aimed at increasing readiness can work to move a school to a Stage 2 (which is on a path toward reform) under some conditions, provided that the interventions are designed to address issues of capacity and willingness. The HPLC strategies of *data-based inquiry, collaborative planning based on comprehensive principles of High Performance Learning Communities, and*

ensemble coaching proved to be powerful with different effects related to a school's conditions of capacity and willingness. Schools that went the furthest toward full readiness started at higher levels. But in every case, the support strategies were adapted and focused to build capacity and willingness that would last beyond the immediate planning process.

Lesson 3: The improvement of severely dysfunctional schools requires external leverage to alter their essential operations and organizational climate.

The HPLC support strategies were designed to focus on conditions at a school, including its relationship to the community. For all but one of the low-performing schools, these strategies were effective in assisting them to realize a higher state of readiness to engage in comprehensive reform. The exception was a school in such a low stage of development that it was dysfunctional, barely able to carry out its day-today schooling activities at a tolerable level. Under such circumstances, the support strategies had limited value. More leverage was needed to alter the basic school operations and culture. Direct district intervention was needed. It was not forthcoming during the period of the state program.

More generally, districts can play a vital role in the transformation of low-performing schools by developing an accountability that is meaningful in educational terms and widely accepted as legitimate. Districts also need to create an infrastructure of support (including resources) that assists the schools in becoming ready for and being able to implement comprehensive change.

Lesson 4: Strong external accountability can advance readiness under some conditions, but retard readiness under other conditions.

A state system of school accountability can help create urgency for reform. It can do so by shaking some schools out of a misplaced complacency and motivating other schools to take their problems seriously. Further, strong state accountability can pressure districts to take action to remedy their chronically failing schools — and it can provide leverage for external support providers to guide a school through change processes that they otherwise might not attempt. Without such accountability for student performance from the state and/or the district, many low-performing schools are unlikely to show rapid enough progress.

Yet, labeling schools as under-performing and imposing mandated sanctions can also create defensiveness that may make fragile situations less likely to change. More generally, external accountability systems should have a balance of sanctions and support, as the California program does.[17] However, such accountability policies need to be applied flexibly otherwise they run the risk of being mismatched to a school's capacity and willingness. Schools with a high willingness to change but a low capacity to do so mostly need capacity building supports. Schools with a high capacity but a low willingness to undertake reform mostly need high external expectations for progress with clear sanctions imposed for the lack of improvement. Therefore, support strategies should be mixed and matched in practice according to a detailed diagnosis of the key dimensions of the school's readiness. And it is consequently important for state and district policies to afford schools and their providers the latitude to fit such contextually-based adaptations to each school's reality.

Lesson 5: Schools need different amounts of time to become fully ready for reform.

Many policies assume that all low-performing schools require the same amount of planning time to be ready for reform. Moreover, they also assume that genuine improvement in student performance takes the same time, usually a year or two from when implementation of an action plan begins. The reality is quite different. A short planning period (five months in the case

of II/USP) was enough for one of the low-performing schools that began the process at a relative high state of readiness. Three of the other schools made substantial progress, but needed more time and support to be fully ready to tackle comprehensive reform.

This need for differential amounts of time creates a policy problem akin to social promotion. When the required planning time is over, the school either goes forward to implementation or else. The pressure on schools is overwhelming towards going to implementation of an action plan, even though the pre-conditions for engaging in such reform have not been built. The chances of these schools being successful in the few years they have to show genuine improvement is therefore low. A better policy would be to extend the time and target the support to get schools to high levels of the capacity and willingness to engage in fundamental change.

Such a policy could become an excuse for some schools not to undertake readiness building processes. Local flexibility is again needed to assess the situation. However, time should not be extended for schools diagnosed as dysfunctional to the point of not being susceptible to effective school-based support strategies. In these situations, external leverage from the district should be put into place quickly in order to alter the essential operations and organizational climate. At that point, the pre-conditions can be established more easily for the slower but more lasting systemic strategies similar to those developed in the High Performance Learning Community Project.

The more patient and differentiated paths toward comprehensive reform stand the best chance of truly transforming low-performing schools.

ENDNOTES

[1] Research suggests that students in low-income communities have benefited the least from comprehensive school reform efforts to date. See Berman et al. (1995); Gandara, (1994); Little & Dorph, (1998); Olsen, (1994).

[2] See Berman, Ericson, Aburto, Lashaw, & Thompson (1998) and Berman, Fields-Tyler, & Thorp (1999).

[3] The HPLC Project is also engaged in other replication work. See Berman & Thorp (1999).

[4] This paper uses pseudonyms instead of the actual names of the schools and their districts.

[5] Financial resources are another element of capacity, of course. This report does not address this factor directly.

[6] See Berman et al. (1998) and Berman, Fields-Tyler, & Thorp (1999).

[7] See Berman, Kamprath, Perry, & Wood (2000) and Geiser & Berman (2000).

[8] In practice, the research team rated each school on 19 dimensions using five point rubric scales developed in the HPLC Project. The rubric scores represented in Table 4 simplify these measurements by focusing on the broader HPLC domains. See Berman et al, (2000).

[9] See Geiser & Chambliss (1999) for a further discussion of equity.

[10] The Principal is often a school leader, but not necessarily the only leader. In some cases, leadership from the staff takes the place of a "weak " Principal.

[11] The literature on the importance and characteristics of leadership is quite extensive. The above list of skills and attributes of school leaders is consistent with much of this literature, though we have focused primarily on those characteristics most pertinent to readiness for reform. For our notion of implementation "know-how," see Berman, Fields-Tyler, & Thorp (1999). For a general review of the literature, see Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, (1994). For works that are consistent with the point of view presented here, see Fullan, (1991); Hallinger, Murphy, & Hausman (1992); Sergiovanni, (1992), and Smith & Andrews, (1989).

[12] See Berman, et al. (1998) and Berman, Fields-Tyler, & Thorp (1999); Berman, et al (2000).

[13] Berman argues that all replications of social innovations must be adapted or they will fail. See Berman & Nelson (1996).

[14] DBI is described in a variety of reports from the HPLC Project. See for example Geiser & Berman (2000). The tools and procedures for DBI are presented in a draft CD-ROM developed by the HPLC Project. See Wood & Sprehe (2000).

[15] The National Coalition of Essential Schools is one example of a national school reform network that integrates guiding principles with powerful examples of real schools to deepen its efforts to improve equity and achievement.

[16] For a description of the Principles Assessment process and the Principles Assessment tools, see Berman, et al., 2000.

[17] Berman (1985).

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